

METHODS OF NURSING IN THE NURSES' SETTLEMENT, NEW YORK CITY

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THE Nurses' Settlement, New York City, recently incorporated under the title of the Henry Street Settlement, is the outgrowth of the work of two nurses, Miss Lillian D. Wald and Miss Mary M. Brewster. Upon the foundation of their years of personal effort has grown a large plant which has divided itself into four definite branches of usefulness. Each branch has its own head, but each is alike under the guidance of Miss Wald, much as the colleges of a university are gathered under the sheltering wings of their *Alma Mater*. These four branches are:

1. Civic work—fights for (clean) streets, better schools, more parks, improved housing conditions, etc.
2. Social work—clubs, classes, kindergarten, gymnasiums, etc.
3. Country work—summer fresh-air parties, camps, vacation houses, convalescent homes.
4. Visiting nursing.

It is with the last branch mentioned, the visiting nursing, its aims, system, and method, that this article has to deal. From time to time nurses make casual visits at the Settlement, and from the questions that are put to us we realize that we have been so busy growing and developing that we have probably not taken our sister nurses sufficiently into our confidence. It is doubtless our fault that in those from whom we naturally expect the greatest sympathy we have sometimes felt a lack of understanding.

The nursing staff of the Henry Street Settlement to-day numbers thirty trained nurses. Five of these are busied about the various executive posts, heads of different branches, convalescent homes, etc. The remaining twenty-five have to deal directly with the visiting nursing, and include a supervisor, an assistant supervisor, and twenty-three staff nurses. As we are dealing in this article with the subject of the *visiting nursing*, we shall touch only upon the work of the twenty-five who comprise the nursing staff as related to the visiting nursing. Of this group the two supervisors and ten staff nurses are of the household at 265 Henry Street. The remaining thirteen live in other settlement houses scattered throughout the city, or in flats

of their own, but always in the neighborhood of the people whom they wish to serve.

A new-coming nurse, except in cases of emergency, begins her work by making residence at the headquarters, the Nurses' Settlement, 265 Henry Street, and is assigned to one of the near-by districts. These particular districts, by reason of the density of population about and also because they comprise the oldest field of the Settlement, are small, and the new-comer avoids the confusion of being obliged to learn a larger district at once. Her work is at first very carefully supervised. Be she a training-school superintendent who, wearied of overmuch organization, desires to spend some time in the simple "laying on of hands," or be she a young woman fresh from hospital walls, she has in her early days the same careful oversight, that all misunderstandings of peoples and customs may be avoided, and that a uniform method of nursing may be maintained. There is no established period of probation, but no nurse is considered with reference to a definite post until a month at least has been passed in the service. Some, of course, show aptitude early, while to others the understanding of the point of view of those who live under conditions and with traditions so foreign dawns slowly. If there seems to be a dawning light, a nurse is retained at the Settlement to give it every chance of development. The Settlement feels that its mission is not merely to maintain a perfect staff of assistants, but that it also has a rare opportunity to help others to an understanding of the problem of the poor man, irrespective of where her final field of work may lie.

After a nurse has proven her fitness for the work, and her desire to remain in it, she is accepted as a regular staff-worker, and may either be retained at the Nurses' Settlement or sent to one of the outside posts, where her responsibility is greater and her opportunity for individual expression larger. Much care is taken in the selection of the women for these outside posts. Her months of work in the parent house must have proved her to be absolutely reliable both in sincerity and in judgment, and she must be so thoroughly imbued with the method of work that there may be confidence that the farthest outlying district is being conducted on lines identical with every other post. Each nurse's personal taste is considered, and the one who finds herself most in sympathy with the Irish people is sent to an Irish district, the Italian sympathizer to an Italian district, the Jewish to a Jewish, the Bohemian to a Bohemian, etc. It will be observed that following out this line of procedure makes the Nurses' Settlement serve as a sort of training-school for visiting nursing both

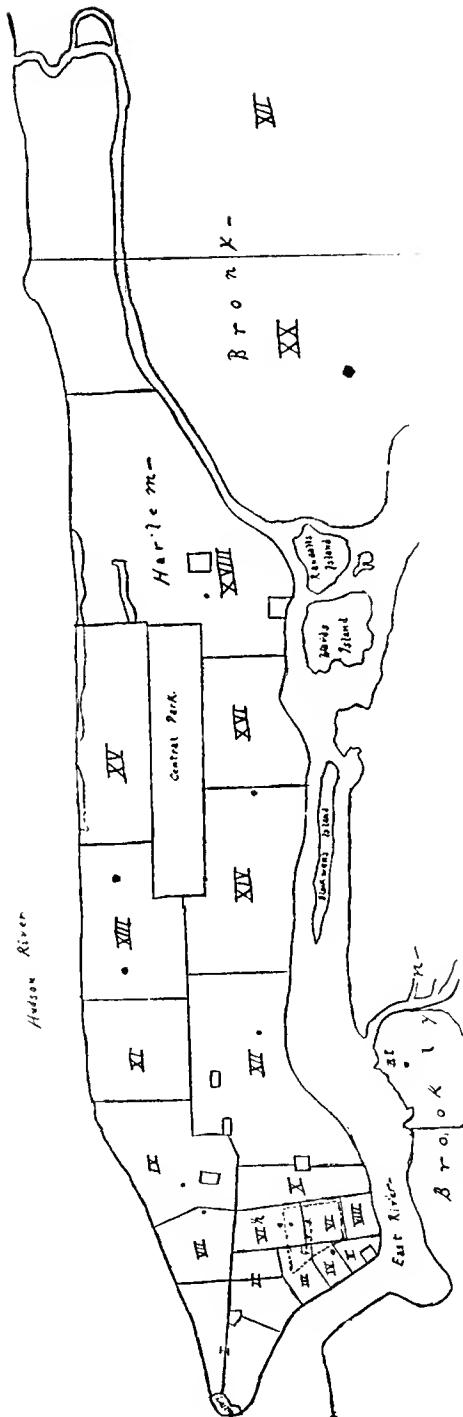


Chart showing district lines and (*) nurse in residence.

for New York and for workers far afield. Many nurses who have tired of some special line of work, or who want to study visiting nursing with a view to finding out their own degree of fitness, are admitted to the staff for a period of time on exactly the same terms as those who apply for definite positions. In the spring and summer, during the vacation period, there is especial opportunity for nurses to make a trial in settlement work. These months being the "slack" time for private nurses, many are glad to act as substitutes and at the same time find out for themselves if there is not something of satisfaction for them in the life of the visiting nurse.

The nature of the work from a professional point of view varies very much, according to the nature of the district. In that crowded part known as the "lower east side," where the settlement nurse has had a foot-hold for fifteen years, and where the early arrivals from Ellis Island are filled with much distrust of hospitals and institutions, the service is very acute. Pneumonia predominates, and typhoid fever and meningitis follow close on its heels. On the surgical side burns of all degrees are very abundant, and leg ulcers are always with us. Unlike many visiting nursing organizations, our obstetric service is small. The free midwifery service from two or three obstetrical hospitals makes fairly good provision along this line, and, coupled with the work of foreign-born midwives, covers this field to a great extent. There is, however, a small service among the class who can pay a little for the help of a visiting nurse at this time, and there are at the Settlement one or two nurses specialized to obstetrics, according to the number of cases on hand.

New York City is also favored in that the Department of Health has a staff of nurses who assist in cases of diphtheria, scarlet fever, and measles. The settlement nurses are thus spared a complication, and may retire from a case of contagion, knowing that the gap will be filled by a nurse from the Department.

The remuneration of visiting nurses is not large, but when it is borne in mind that it is an assured income, with one month of vacation on full salary each year, it is able to hold its own against a larger but less certain income. The salaries of the Nurses' Settlement compare fairly well with those of other localities. For the initial month, the month of probation, one-half salary is paid—thirty dollars—but as the board must be paid out of this sum, there is but small margin left. The first month safely passed, nurses are paid at the rate of sixty dollars per month for the first year. At the end of this time the salary is raised to seventy dollars and there are a few of seventy-five dollars for those who have been longest in the district.